# MAHOGONY, ARISTOCRAT, IN CENTRAL AMERICA

## The King of Furniture Woods—Methods of Cutting. With the Hunters in Their Camps—New Banana Plantations—Central American Cattle

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PORT BARRIOS, Guatemala.

I write you from the edge of Mahogany Land. This Motagua valley, which lies at the foot of the Guatemala mountains, back of Port Barrios, has hundreds of mahogany trees, which are being cut down by the United Fruit Company, that the land may be used for banana plantations. The mahogany is so valuable that it sells by the pound, and a few trees would make a good income. I have been in the mahogany country off and on ever since I left Panama, and I learn that valuable timber is being taken from the northern part of the Panama republic. I found them exploiting the forests in Costa Rica and Nicaragua, and am told that many mahogany camps are now working in both British and Spanish Honduras. There are American lumbermen sending mahogany to Panama all along the west coasts of Central America. The logs are sent over the isthmus by rail, and thence shipped to Europe or the United States. The trees they are now cutting here still lie in the clearing, but they will be taken by train to Port Barrios, and thence shipped.

**Central American Mahogany.**

The mahogany of this part of the world is the real article. We have a so-called mahogany in the Philippines, and there are false mahoganies in Nigeria, Ceylon, Madeira and California. The true mahogany, the wood which makes the finest furniture on earth, comes from this region. It is found in the lowlands along the east coast from Mexico to Panama, and also in Colombia and Venezuela and in the islands of the Caribbean sea. The trees are magnificent. I have seen some one hundred feet high and thirty-six feet in circumference. Not a few rise sixty feet above the ground before the branches begin and some are so large that five men, joining hands, cannot encircle them.

There is no such thing as a mahogany forest. The trees do not grow close together, but at wide distances apart; and the mahogany hunters climb the highest trees of the forest and pick out the mahoganies by their bright colored leaves. The leaves change from season to season and at times they are as gorgeous as our leaves in autumn. The hunter marks the mahogany by the color and then leads the cutters through the jungle, hacking a road to where the doomed tree stands. Often only two or three trees are found on an acre, but two trees per acre are enough to pay dividends. There is a record of one corporation which had a mahogany concession of about 25,000 acres, the total yield of which was only sixty trees or less than two per square mile. I doubt if it paid.

**How the Logging Is Done.**

The ordinary tree ought to be at least a yard in diameter, and the average tree is usually one or two hundred years old before it is ready for lumber. The most of the wood is cut in the rainy season, but as the trees grow in the lowlands the hauling can only be done in the dry season when the ground is hard. As soon as the trees are felled their limbs are cut off and the logs are then taken to the nearest stream. They are rafted down to the market, or they may go to the railroad and be taken to the ports on the cars. They are put upon shipboard as soon as they reach port to prevent their being attacked by the toredo and other boring insects. The wood is so valuable that it is handled like fruit, and a close record is kept of it from the forest to the hands of the consumer. One of the chief markets is London, and others are New York and New Orleans.

**In the Woods of Honduras.**

A great deal of our best mahogany now comes from British Honduras, and we get much also from the Honduras republic. The British Honduras timber is exported from Belize, which is not very far from Port Barrios, and I am told that the wealth of that town has largely come from this trade. The forests are exploited by lumbermen, who hire gangs of natives for the season, and have the exporting houses to advance the provisions and cash to carry on the cutting. The labor contracts are usually made during the Christmas holidays, the men being hired by the year. Six months' wages are usually paid in advance, one-half of which is in goods and the other half cash. The lumbermen are as dissipated as are those of our own and other countries, and they usually have a carouse before they leave Belize, during which time the cash disappears.

They now leave and go into the woods, where they build camps of huts thatched with palm leaves, including a larger building for the store and dwelling of the overseer. The labor is divided into gangs, each of which has a captain. The work is done by the task. The best laborers are out at daybreak, and a good man can finish his task by 11 o'clock. He can then spend the rest of his day in hunting or fishing, or he can cut out of mahogany paddles and other things for which there is a ready market. The lumber camps are not pious places. Many of the laborers are roughs, and there are frequent fights and considerable drunkenness. There are also bad women who follow the camps, and the crowd is not a Sunday school one. The overseers live well. Each has his own boat, with from twelve to twenty Indian rowers, and his own cook and Indian valet.

**Felling Mahogany.**

The green mahogany is not easy to fell, and the bringing of a large tree to the ground is a day's task for two men. The cutting is done about ten feet from the base on account of the wide spurs which project from the trunk and a platform or scaffold has to be erected where the sawmen and axmen can stand.

After the trees are felled roads have to be made to the rivers and the streams on the way must be bridged. Much of the wood is hauled upon rude trucks which have wheels of solid wood sawed from the end of a log and having iron boxes fitted into the center. Much of the work is done in the night by torchlights of pitch-pine. All this is in the dry season. The rafting is done in the late summer or fall and the camps break up about the middle of December. After that the laborers return to Belize and they then receive the balance due them, which results in another great spree.

**In Spanish Honduras.**

I understand there is a great deal of mahogany yet uncut in Spanish Honduras or the Honduras republic. Mahogany grows in the valleys all over that country, and especially in the lowlands along the northern coast of the Caribbean sea.

It is near this coast, running inland fifty or more miles, that the chief banana plantations are, and not far from the sea in the same region are immense cocoanut groves with tens of thousands of bearing trees.

The most of the banana industry belongs to the United Fruit Company, and that company has a line of steamers which plies regularly between Port Cortez and New Orleans, calling at Port Barrios and Belize on the way. The shipments of bananas amount to 2,000,000 bunches and upward per year, which means an aggregate of more than 300,000,000 bananas per annum. The business is carried on about the same as it is in Guatemala, Costa Rica and Panama. The plantations have many little railroads for carrying the fruit. They are divided into farms, and each farm is a settlement of its own. The overseers are Americans, and the labor is largely done by negroes from Jamaica and the other islands of the West Indies, who come there for the purpose.

**Making a Banana Plantation.**

The process of making the plantations is about the same everywhere. The jungle has to be cut down, and this means the felling of trees from three to ten feet in diameter and the cutting out of underbrush and lianas through which it is impossible to go without a machete or ax. As soon as the land has been cleared, it is burned over and then the markers go through and stake out the holes where the plants are to be set. The banana plants come from sprouts of the older trees and they are set out about as far apart each way as the tree of the average peach orchard. They are planted among the half-burned logs and grow without cultivation. The only thing is to keep down the weeds, when the logs will soon rot away. I have seen plants growing among trees as big around as a flour barrel, and in going over the plantations have had to keep to the paths in order to make my way through upon horseback.

About a year after setting out the bananas they are twenty or thirty feet high and are ready to fruit. Each tree bears but one bunch of bananas, and when this is taken off the tree is cut down and the sprouts which have grown up about its roots are left to produce the next crop.

The cutting of the bananas is with a sharp knife on the end of a pole, the cutters catching the bunch as it falls. The bananas are carefully handled. The piles, which wait for the train, are laid on soft beds of leaves, and the cars are padded with leaves in order to keep the fruit from being bruised.

**Banana Settlements.**

It is a big task to start a banana plantation, and the plans must be carefully made. The estate is first surveyed and paths and roads are laid out, the same being connected by tramways and railroads. And then the farm settlements have to be built and in each there must be a store, a carpenter shop and a blacksmith shop and also the stables and the homes of the workmen. Some of the managers and overseers bring their wives with them from the United States and they must have comfortable homes screened with wire netting.

Some of these houses here are beautifully finished and well furnished. They have the latest magazines and papers, and in some of them you will find many novels, histories and scientific books. Many of the white employes have hobbies. One may be an ornithologist, another a bug-hunter and there are no end of collectors of orchids and other strange flowers. At the Virginia banana plantation near here they have quite an aviary, containing many of the quaint birds of Guatemala. These include the wild turkey, which has a brilliant yellow color, the tuma with its gorgeous plumage, and the policeman-bird, which makes a terrible screeching if strangers come near the house.

I do not know just how many thousand acres are planted to bananas in Spanish Honduras, but the Guatemala estates belonging to the United Fruit Company cover tens of thousands of acres, and 20,000 acres are already in bearing. This is divided up into banana farms of a thousand acres each, each farm having sections of twenty acres each. Every farm has its own manager, the account sheets being kept separately so that it is known just what each section costs and what it is yielding from year to year. Indeed, a cost sheet is kept of this business just as in our factories and machine shops at home. The general manager of the plantation is Mr. Victor M. Cutter, a young New Englander, who came here a few years ago, just after graduating with high honor at Dartmouth.

**Loading Fruit by Machinery.**

I have been much interested during my stay in Central America in the handling of the banana crop, and especially in watching how the negroes transfer the fruit from the cars to the ships. At Port Limon, Costa Rica, this is done by machinery. The fruit is carried from the plantation to the side of the ship as it lies at the wharf. The tracks are so laid that the train load of bananas is parallel with the steamer, and the fruit from a half dozen different cars can be transferred to the ship at the same time.

The loading is by movable carriers which run upon wheels. Each carrier is a long belt about two feet in width, so arranged that one end of it rests over the opening into the hold, and the other out on the wharf. This belt moves by machinery, and the bananas thrown upon it by laborers, are carried into the hold. I have seen four rivers of bananas thus moving for hours, carrying fruit into a ship.

The men are so trained that the stream of fruit is continuous, the management knowing just how many bunches one man can carry in an hour, and how long it takes to unload each car.

The ship upon which I came here had in its hold 55,000 bunches of bananas bound for New Orleans. Each of those bunches had at least 150 individual bananas, and altogether they were enough to have given every man, woman and child in New York, Boston, Chicago and Philadelphia one banana and still left some to spare.

At New Orleans the fruit is landed in the same way, being there transferred to cold storage cars, which take it to all parts of the Mississippi basin. The bananas for the eastern part of the United States usually go to the seaports of the Atlantic.

**Object Lessons for Central America.**

This work of the Americans on the banana plantations is a series of object lessons in sanitation, agriculture and business management for the people of Central America. Most of the estates have large hospitals and the employes are taught to take care of their health. The workmen's houses are raised upon poles, the vegetation being cut away and the lands drained to get rid of the mosquitoes. The laborers are made to keep clean and they are shown how to treat themselves for tropical diseases. The United Fruit Company has been fighting the hookworm, and it has its doctors giving medicines and treating the numerous natives among its employes who are so afflicted. Every patient who comes to the hospital on account of malaria or other fevers or on account of wounds received is treated also for hookworm. I am told that this is doing great good and that an increase in the working efficiency of the men has come from such treatment.

**Farm Methods in Central America.**

The Americans are introducing our farm machinery. They have American wagons and carts and also American plows and other farm tools. As to the native methods, everything is rude. I see the farmers still using the one-handled plow of the Scripture, shod with a strip of pointed iron about as big as your hand. This turns the soil both ways and only scratches the surface. The most common cart here has wooden wheels with holes in the center for the axles, and it is drawn by oxen yoked by their horns. The loads are pulled by the head instead of the shoulders and necks, and the treatment of the animals seems cruel to an extreme.

American axes are gradually coming into use, but the most of the cutting of the lighter sort is done with the machete, much like a corncutter. Every native Central American carries a machete. It is a good weapon of defense against man or beast, and it enables him to make his way through the jungle. It cuts his grass for hay and the green corn for his cattle. After the cattle are dead, the machete chops them up to make beef and is also employed in hog killing. It serves to cut out the weeds from the corn patch and with it the native punches holes in the ground where he drops the grains of corn at planting time. He then covers the corn with his heel and sitting down, lets nature do the rest.

**Teaching Stock Farming.**

The Americans here are teaching the natives something of stock farming, and the day may come when meat from Central America will reduce our big butcher bills. In Costa Rica there are large ranches belonging to the banana planters where working cattle for the plantations are reared. The United Fruit Company has some dairy cows and its men tell me that the grass there makes excellent beef. Indeed, there is money to be made in raising stock, all the way from Panama to Mexico. These highlands have fine pastures and the stock brings good prices. In upper Panama they are now raising beef for Colon and Panama City, and the future meat supply of the canal may come from there.

Costa Rica has live stock numbering more than half a million, besides mules, sheep and goats, and Honduras has almost a half million head of cattle alone, and a large number of mules, pigs and sheep. It has 150,000 acres devoted to pasture.

Here is Guatemala the cattle are fewer, but the grazing grounds on the high plateaus are of great extent, and well fitted for sheep, cattle and hogs. Nicaragua has more than a million of cattle and Salvador in proportion to its size has more live stock than any other Central American republic.

FRANK G. CARPENTER.

# DOUBLE DAILY SERVICE MT. AIRY TO SANFORD

**Petitions for Such Convenience Have Been Prepared by Those Living Along Southern Line.**

Greensboro, Jan. 11.—Efforts are being made here and by residents along the Old Cape Fear and Yadkin Valley branch of the Southern Railway from Mt. Airy to Sanford to secure a double daily service. Petitions have been prepared and are to be distributed along the line of the road for signers. Under the present schedule there is but one through passenger train a day between Mt. Airy and Sanford, one leaving Mt. Airy early in the morning and in the incoming one arriving about 8 o'clock at night. The idea is to have a morning and afternoon incoming and outgoing service. Between Mt. Airy and Sanford are a number of thriving towns and cities and a well populated country and it is declared the service is badly needed and that the travel along the line is sufficient to warrant such an accom-

# CRATE OF ORANGES COMES BY PARCELS POST

**Spencer Destination of Fruit, Which is Beautifully Boxed in Miniature Form.**

Spencer, Jan. 11.—A whole crate of oranges by parcel post is what came to W. G. Horne in Spencer Thursday night. The fruit, a ripe, yellow variety of tiny oranges, enclosed in a miniature crate constructed of button wood and bamboo showing the best of workmanship, came from Albert Boone, a large truck farmer and fruit grower in Florida. He is an old friend of Mr. Horne and the package was sent as an illustration of what the parcel post will do. Mr. Boone was at one time station agent for the old Richmond and Danville railroad at Gibsonville, and has not seen Mr. Horne for thirty-seven years. He has, it is said, accumulated a fortune in Florida.

## CLEAR SIDEWALKS.

**Durham Police Chief Gives Warning to Contractors.**

Durham, Jan. 11.—Chief of Police J. F. Freeland today informed all the contractors who are building houses in the central part of the city that they would have to clear the sidewalks so that pedestrians would not be forced into the streets. The people who are building the new hotel, the addition to the Presbyterian Sunday school, the Shevil building and the Johnson building at Five points have been given permission by the aldermen to close up the sidewalks, but at a recent meeting this permission was revoked, and the chief of police today served notice on the contractors that they would have to clear the sidewalks.

The minister who feels sad when he reflects on the sorrows of humanity is apt to feel sadder still when he reflects on the amusements.

His best companions, innocence and health;
And his best riches, ignorance of wealth. —Goldsmith.